

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

110315Z Nov 02

2002HOCHI01140 - UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED PTO4849

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ACTION DRL-02

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	SRPP-00	EAP-00	EB-00
	UTED-00	VC-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00
	VCE-00	AC-01	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OIC-02	OMB-01	PA-00
	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	SS-00	STR-00
	TEST-00	TRSE-00	T-00	USIE-00	PMB-00	PRM-00	G-00
	SAS-00	/007W					

-----0657CB 110629Z /40

FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7059  
INFO AMEMBASSY HANOI PRIORITY  
ASEAN COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 001140

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PGOV SOCI KIRF VM HUMANR RELFREE

SUBJECT: HOA HAO MONK DEFIES GOVERNMENT ORDER AND CLIMBS A  
TREE (AGAIN)

REF: HO CHI MINH CITY 0719

1. (SBU) ON NOVEMBER 7, CONTROVERSIAL HOA HAO MONK NAM  
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LIEM (VO THANH LIEM) CLIMBED A TREE INSIDE THE COMPOUND OF  
HIS PRIVATE PAGODA FOR THE THIRD TIME IN EIGHT YEARS (SEE  
REFTEL), AFTER LOCAL AUTHORITIES GAVE HIM THREE DAYS TO  
TEAR DOWN A GATE ON HIS PROPERTY. HE HAS THREATENED TO  
THROW HIMSELF FROM THE TREE, IF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT TAKES  
ANY ACTION AGAINST HIS PROPERTY. ACCORDING TO CONTACTS,  
POLICE HAVE SURROUNDED AND BARRICADED HIS PAGODA. HOA HAO  
BELIEVERS, A SIZABLE NUMBER OF WHOM WORSHIP AT LIEM'S  
PRIVATE PAGODA ON A REGULAR BASIS, HAVE GATHERED OUTSIDE TO  
MONITOR THE SITUATION.

2. (SBU) ON NOVEMBER 6, A HOA HAO ORGANIZATION IN THE U.S.  
NOTIFIED POST THAT GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAD ORDERED NAM  
LIEM TO REMOVE THE GATE TO HIS PROPERTY IN AN GIANG  
PROVINCE'S CHO MOI DISTRICT. HOA HAO BELIEVERS HEAVILY  
POPULATE THIS DISTRICT. TWO RESPECTED HOA HAO ELDERS IN HO  
CHI MINH CITY VERIFIED THE U.S.-ORIGINATED INFORMATION BY  
COMMUNICATING WITH SOURCES ON THE GROUND NEAR NAM LIEM'S  
HOME. SURPRISINGLY, NEITHER OF THE HCMC ELDERS HAD HEARD  
ABOUT THE INCIDENT UNTIL POST CONTACTED THEM. ONE OF THE  
ELDERS REPORTED THAT LOCAL POLICE HAD VISITED HIM ON  
NOVEMBER 6 - A MOVE HE NOW INTERPRETED AS INTENDED TO  
INTIMIDATE HIM FROM TRAVELING TO AN GIANG. THIS ELDER  
STATED THAT HE WOULD CONSIDER TAKING ACTION IF OFFICIALS  
DID ANYTHING TO HARM NAM LIEM OR REMOVE THE GATE. HE ADDED  
THAT HOA HAO BELIEVERS IN AN GIANG WERE PREPARED TO DO THE  
SAME.

3. (SBU) NAM LIEM FIRST CLIMBED UP A TREE AND STAYED THERE  
FOR FOUR DAYS IN 1994, AFTER POLICE CAME TO ARREST HIM FOR  
CONSTRUCTING PARTS OF HIS PRIVATE PAGODA, INCLUDING THE  
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GATE, WITHOUT A BUILDING LICENSE. HE SERVED A FOUR-YEAR  
PRISON SENTENCE FOLLOWING THAT INCIDENT, BUT NEVER REMOVED  
THE GATE. UPON HIS RELEASE FROM PRISON, HE WELCOMED THE  
GOVERNMENT'S RECOGNITION OF THE HOA HAO, ALTHOUGH HE LATER  
BECAME DISILLUSIONED WITH THE GVN-SANCTIONED HOA HAO  
ORGANIZATION. IN NOVEMBER 2001, NAM LIEM WENT UP THE SAME  
TREE WITH GASOLINE AND A KNIFE IN RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT  
ATTEMPTS TO REMOVE HOA HAO FLAGS AND OTHER INSIGNIA FROM  
HIS GATE. HE WAS NOT ARRESTED THE SECOND TIME, BUT  
MUTILATED HIS OWN LEG, BEFORE EVENTUALLY COMING DOWN FROM  
THE TREE VOLUNTARILY.

4. (SBU) THIS TIME, IT IS UNCLEAR WHAT PROMPTED THE LOCAL  
AUTHORITIES TO ACT -- NAM LIEM'S DISPLAY OF CONTROVERSIAL  
HOA HAO INSIGNIA ON HIS GATE, OR PREVIOUS CONCERNS OVER THE  
UNLICENSED CONSTRUCTION, THOUGH THE ONE CERTAINLY  
EXACERBATES THE OTHER. (POST NOTE: PER REFTEL, PREVIOUS  
POLOFF WAS PREVENTED FROM VISITING NAM LIEM IN JUNE 2002,

BY A GANG OF YOUNG MEN BLOCKING THE PATH TO HIS PAGODA IN A  
THREATENING MANNER.) ALTHOUGH THE HOA HAO ELDERS IN HCMC  
ARE SOMEWHAT CONCERNED ABOUT THE SITUATION, THEY HAVE NOT  
ASKED FOR ASSISTANCE OR INQUIRIES ON OUR PART. POST WILL  
DO ITS BEST TO CONTINUE TO MONITOR THE SITUATION  
YAMAUCHI

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